WHO WERE THE PHOENICIANS ACCORDING TO HERODOTUS AND DIODORUS SICULUS?

We have seen that Aziru mentioned in the el–Amarna tablets is the Israelite tribe of Asher, and that this tribe conquered the region of Sidon. We have shown that the Exodus occurred in c. 1446 B. C. Therefore the invasion of Canaan by the Israelites (the destruction of Jericho) began c. 1406 B. C., while the beginning of the separate tribal wars was c. 1376 B. C., namely in the period of the el–Amarna tablets. The region of Sidon, which is considered a Canaanite–Phoenician region, since the Israelites had supposedly not succeeded in conquering it, became in fact an Israelite region during the el–Amarna period. Hence, if the Greeks called this region "Phoenicia", and as seen above, this must have been after the conquest of Aziru – Asher, then this name refers to an Israelite region and Israelite inhabitants.

Herodotus–the earliest of historians (484–425 B. C.) in his writings on the ancient east, also indicates, here and there, certain borderlines between countries. In his book (IV, 39) we read about the lands that extend between Persia and Egypt: "But the second (peninsula–N. G.) beginning with Persia stretches to the Red Sea being the Persian land, and next the neighbouring country of Assyria, and after Assyria, Arabia; this peninsula ends (yet not truly but only by common consent) at the Arabian Gulf, whereunto Darius brought a canal from the Nile. Now from the Persian country to Phoenice there is a wide and great tract of land; and from Phoenice – this peninsula runs beside our sea by the way of the Syrian Palestine and Egypt, which is at the end of it. In this peninsula there are but three nations."[1] Hence according to Herodotus only three nations inhabit the area from Persia to Egypt, namely: the Syrian – Palestinians, the Phoenicians, and the Arabians. In another paragraph[2], Herodotus tells us about the tribute paid to the Persians by the nations subject to them: "The country reaching from the city of Posideium built by Amphilochus, son of Amphiaraus, on the confines of Syria and Cilicia, to the borders of Egypt, excluding therefrom a district which belonged to Arabia, and was free from tax, paid a tribute of three hundred and fifty talents. All Phoenicia, Palestine Syria, and Cyprus, were herein contained."

1 Herodotus, Translation by Godley, Loeb Classical Library. see also de Sélincourt–Penguin edit. p. 254. and G. Rawlinson p. 216.

2 Herodotus, III – 91, p. 181, Translation by Rawlinson. see also de Sélincourt p. 214.

In these two paragraphs as in others,[3] Herodotus tells about the Israelite region without mentioning the name of the Israelite nation. Herodotus describes in full detail the entire region from the Persian Gulf to Egypt (including the region of Israel) without once pronouncing the name of the Israelite nation–this is curious: Or does he, perhaps, mention them, but under some other name?

According to Herodotus, the lands that extend between Persia and Egypt are Syria–Palestine, Phoenicia and the Arabian region. Therefore, if Herodotus mentions the Israelites under another name, then it might be either under that of Syria–Palestine, or that of Phoenicia. Josephus[4] tends to believe that Herodotus mentions the Israelites under the term Syrian–Palestinians – and this is the generally accepted belief today. We will see whether Josephus was correct in his assumption further on. In the meantime, let us try to understand what Herodotus himself meant by Syria–Palestine, and who, according to him, were the Phoenicians?

Herodotus relates in Chapter III, paragraphs 4–5 that: "Now it happened that Cambyses was meditating his attack on Egypt, and doubting how he might best pass the desert, when Phanes arrived, and not only told him all the secrets of Amasis, but advised him also how the desert might be crossed. He counselled him to send an ambassador to the king of the Arabs, and ask him for safe–conduct through the region. Now the only entrance into Egypt is by this desert: the country from Phoenicia to the borders of the city of Cadytis belongs to the people called the Palaestine Syrians; from Cadytis, which it appears to me is a city almost as large as Sardis, the marts upon the coast till you reach Jenysus are the Arabian king's; after Jenysus the Syrians again come in, and extend to lake Serbonis, near the place where Mount Casius juts into the sea. At lake Serbonis where the tale goes that Typhon hid himself, Egypt begins[5].

From Phoenicia till Cadytis the land belongs to the Syrians called Palestinians. From Jenysus till the Serbonian marsh the inhabitants of the country are "the Syrian again", and from the Serbonian marsh the country is Egypt. From the phrase that "The Syrian again come in" it is obvious that it refers to the Syrians mentioned at the beginning of the paragraph, i. e. The Syrians called Palestinians. Herodotus' paragraph is therefore to be understood as follows: Phoenicia borders the country of the Syrian–Palestinians . From Phoenicia till Cadytis the land is that of the Syrian–Palestinians, Then a certain part of the country is inhabited by the Arabians, and then down to the borders of Egypt there are the Syrian–Palestinians again. We have no notion

3 VII – 89.
4 Ant. VIII – 260.
5 Rawlinson Translation, The History of Herodotus. pp. 147–148.

where Cadytis was[6], but it is irrelevant to our purpose. What is important for us to note is that the region of the Syrian–Palestinians extend as far as the borders of Egypt. Corroboration of this fact is found in Herodotus' elsewhere[7]: "This part of Syria, and all the region extending from hence to Egypt is known by the name of Palestine".

Speaking of the Scythians who marched against Egypt Herodotus writes[8]: "When they had reached Palestine, however, Psammetichus the Egyptian king met them with gifts and prayers, and prevailed on them to advance no further. On their return, passing through Ascalon a city of Syria, the greater part of them went their way without doing any damage; but some few who lagged behind pillaged the temple of Celestial Venus. I have inquired and find that the temple of Ascalon is the most ancient of all the temples to this goddess; for the one in Cyprus, as the Cyprian themselves admit, was built in imitation of it; and that in Cythera was erected by the Phoenicians, who belong to this part of Syria." The Scytians on their way BACK from Syria–Palestine were in Ascalon, and in Ascalon there were "Phoenicians, who belong to this part of Syria". It is therefore evident that Syria Palestine must extend at least from Ascalon southward in the direction of Egypt, and as we have already seen above, even as far as the borders of Egypt. According to the Bible this region which extended to the borders of Egypt was the abode of the Philistines, and not of the Israelites. Therefore, if we put together all the above evidence, the Syrian Palestinians of Herodotus are in effect the biblical Philistines. Thus having eliminated one possibility, it remains for us to conclude that Herodotus most probably includes the Israelites under the term "Phoenicians".

According to Herodotus (Vii – 89) "These Phoenicians dwelt in old time, as they say, by the Red Sea, Passing over from thence, they now inhabit the sea coast of Syria."[9] Which sea does Herodotus call the Red Sea? In his writings we find that the river Euphrates flows from Armenia and empties into the Red Sea,[10] and that the Tigris also flows into the Red Sea.[11] We are led to assume that Herodotus' Red Sea is today's Persian Gulf, and there are scholars who believe this to be so.[12]

6 There are several theories, one is that Cadytis is the biblical Kadesh.
7 VII – 89. Rawlinson Translation (p. 383)
8 I–105. Rawlinson's, Translation p. 41.
9 Godley's Translation, Loeb Classical Library, see also Rawlinson's Translation, p. 383. and: I–1.
10 I–180. In Rawlinson's Translation, p. 67.
11 I –189; In Rawlinson's Translation, p. 70.
12 See: Driver, Semitic Writing From Pictograph to Alphabeth, P. 195. Driver accepts that the Phoenicians came from the Persian Gulf, and cites Herodotus in support; Contenau, La Civilisation Phénicienne, p. 284.
Chipiez – Perrot, History of Art In Phoenicia, etc., p. 11
The reason for this belief is based also on a paragraph from Strabo, which was

Yet we also read[13] "Lybia shows clearly that it is encompassed by the sea, save only where it borders on Asia; and this was proved first (as far as we know) by Necos king of Egypt. He, when he had made an end of digging the canal which leads from the Nile to the Arabian Gulf, sent Phoenicians in ships charging them to sail on their return voyage past the pillars of Heracles (today's Gibraltar–N. G.) till they should come into the northern sea and so to Egypt. So the Phoenicians set out from the Red Sea and sailed to the southern Sea". In Book II, Par. 158 we read: "It was he (Necos – N. G.) who began the making of the canal into the Red Sea".

In another paragraph[14] Herodotus tells us that: "This is a sea by itself (i. e. the Caspian sea –N. G.) not joined to the other sea. For that whereon the Greeks sail, and the sea beyond the pillars of Heracles, which they call the Atlantic, and the Red Sea are all one.". We have already noted the paragraph: ". the second (peninsula–N. G.) beginning with Persia stretches to the Red Sea..." (Iv 39).

It is evident from the above paragraphs that by "Red Sea" or "Southern Sea" (Rawlinson translates "Erythraean Sea") Herodotus means the sea around the Arabian peninsula, i. e. today's Persian Gulf and Red Sea. If, according to him, the Phoenicians came from the Red Sea, we may assume that they could have come from any place along it, i. e. from Egypt to the Persian Gulf.[15]

As already noted, if Herodotus includes the Israelites under another name (and this must be assumed since he specifies the nations living in th entire region) then it could only be under that of Phoenicians. According to him, the Phoenicians came from the Red Sea area which we have seen he includes both the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf areas of today, whereas the Bible clearly states the Israelites came to Canaan from the desert of Sinai where they had gone after the Exodus. These statements taken together appear to corroborate our assumption that Herodotus refers to the Israelites by the term Phoenicians.[16]

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understood to imply that there existed two cities in the Persian Gulf called Tyros and Aradus parallel to Tyre and Arad in Phoenicia. However, Pliny already registered his astonishment at Strabo's assertion, and points out that the name of the city is Tylos and not Tyros.

13 IV–42, Godley's Translation, Loeb Classical Library.

14 I – 202.

15 According to the Ras Shamra tablets (which will be discussed later) the Phoenicians came to Canaan from a region near today's Red Sea.

16 Dussaud, who equates Phoenicians with Canaanites, firmly believes the Israelites and the Canaanites had the same original homeland before settling in the country. Ras – Shamra, AAA, 1934, pp. 93–98.
Virolleaud believes the Phoenicians came from the Red Sea region together with the Hebrews. He gets support for his view in the Ras Shamra tablets wherein Zebulun Asher and Terah tribes. are mentioned See: Contenau, Manuel d'Archéologie Orientale, P. 75. ; Barton, Archeology And The Bible, p. 139

In an interesting aside Herodotus (II, 104) notes that: "The Colchians and Egyptians and Ethiopians are the only nations that have from the first practised circumcision. The Phoenicians and the Syrians of Palestine acknowledge of themselves that they learnt the custom from the Egyptians... Those Phoenicians who hold intercourse with Hellas cease to imitate the Egyptians in this matter and do not circumcise their children".

We may conclude therefore, that Herodotus envisaged two kinds of Phoenicians 1. Those who hold intercourse with the Greeks and do not imitate the Egyptians. 2. The other Phoenicians who do imitate the Egyptians, but do not hold intercourse with the Greeks.

Diodorus (XI. 3) writes: "Now that we are about to record the war against the Jews, we consider it appropriate to give first a summary account of the establishment of the nation, from the origins, and of the practices observed among them. When in ancient times a pestilence arose in Egypt, the common people ascribed their troubles to the workings of a divine agency; for indeed with many strangers of all sorts dwelling in their midst and practising different rites of religion and sacrifice, their own traditional observances in honour of the gods had fallen into disuse. Hence the natives of the land surmised that unless they removed the foreigners, their troubles would never be resolved. At once, therefore, the aliens were driven from the country, and the most outstanding and active among them banded together and, as some say, were cast ashore to Greece and certain other regions; their leaders were notable men, chief among them being Danaus and Cadmus. But the greater number were driven into what is now called Judaea, which is not far distant from Egypt and was at that time utterly uninhabited. The colony was headed by a man called Moses" Elsewhere (V, 74), referring to the alphabetic letters he writes: "the Phoenicians having learned them from the Syrians and then passed them on to the Greeks, and that these Phoenicians are those who sailed to Europe together with Cadmus..."[17].

In this account he draws our attention in fact to his statement (XI, 3) about the group of aliens who left Egypt (not Phoenicia) with Cadmus. By stressing that "these Phoenicians are those who sailed..."etc. he differentiates them from those Phoenicians who did not sail with Cadmus and remained behind in Egypt (not Phoenicia). As Diodorus tells it those Phoenicians who sailed with Cadmus were "the most outstanding and active among them..." (i. e. the aliens – N. G.). It is obvious, therefore, that the Phoenicians who did not sail with Cadmus and remained in Egypt were "the greater number" of the aliens who according to Diodorus were led by Moses to Judaea. Let us not forget that Diodorus tells us this as a "summary account of the establishment of the nation (Jewish –N. G) from the origins".

We have already discussed in previous chapters the indubitable

17 Diodorus Siculus, Walton's Translation edit. Heinemann, London.

conclusion, based on the el–Amarna tablets and the Bible, that the region of Sidon, generally accepted as a "Phoenician" region, was conquered by the tribe of Asher. It was shown that names such as Tyrian and Sidonian do not specifically mean Canaanites. Any citizen of Tyre or Sidon was called Tyrian or Sidonian, and these names cannot be equated with the term Canaanite, as accepted today. We have now seen that if Herodotus tells us anything about the Israelites it must be looked for under the term "Phoenicians". When Diodorus gives a summary account of the Jewish origins, he describes them as aliens in Egypt, of whom "the most outstanding and active among them" are referred to as Phoenicians. We may therefore definitely conclude that the term "Phoenicians" is the Greek name for the nation of Israel

If the Phoenicians and the Israelites are one and the same, why are they regarded today as two different nations? Why have historians, including Josephus who was himself a Jew, written about the Phoenicians and the Israelites as two distinct nations?

To answer this question and to understand this chapter in history, we have to go back over Israelite history from the time of Israel's formation as a nation, and to trace its political and religious development. Only then will we be able to understand the reasons and causes that brought about the present–day differentiation between Phoenicians and Israelites.